



Exercise 4.8

Knowing the Community



Resource professionals who have lived in a community for a long time will know a great deal about the residents and have an intuitive sense of how to approach them. If the community is in transition, however, resource professionals may not have a good sense of who the newcomers are. If the resource professional is new to the region, this exercise will help him or her think about who the audience is.

Objectives: Participants will be able to do the following:

1. Identify what they already know about their communities.
2. Identify what they need to learn about their communities.
3. State how to discover the information they need in order to understand their audiences.

Materials:

A phone book with yellow pages for the area
Worksheet 1: What Do You Know about the Community?
Fact Sheet 4.1: Communication Basics
Fact Sheet 4.2: Starting an Informal Presentation
Fact Sheet 4.5: Tools for Understanding Audiences
Presentation 4.1
Optional: Map of the region

Time: 30 minutes

1. Explain that a good presentation is a careful balancing act between understanding what the audience already knows and addressing what the presenter wants to say in a way the audience wants to hear it. At a very broad level, we can imagine a lot about what the audience cares about by virtue of who they are. Most residents care about environmental quality and children's safety. Most developers want to build quality but economically feasible developments. Most community decision makers must balance a variety of conflicting perspectives while serving the majority. But within each group there are also differences. One resident may not have children, and another may have just moved into the neighborhood last week. These two demographic facts—presence of children and years in the community—mean these audience members will have different information and care about different things.
2. It is important to know about the audience before you start a presentation or communication program. ***Fact Sheets 4.1: Communication Basics*** and ***4.2: Starting an Informal Presentation*** and

Presentation 4.1 provide some background information that may be helpful. Explain that there are a variety of ways to learn more about an audience—from informally chatting with the local barber to conducting a formal survey (**Fact Sheet 4.5: Tools for Understanding Audiences**). It may help your participants to have a sense of what they already know about their community and to begin considering how they can get additional information.

3. Distribute *Worksheet 1: What Do You Know about the Community?* to each member of the group. Ask them to think about the audiences they work with and answer the questions. Give them 10–15 minutes to work individually.
4. After they have finished the worksheet, have the full group come back together and facilitate discussion with the following questions:
 - Do you know enough to know what people in this community care about?
 - What things are important to them?
 - What information about the community are you most comfortable with?
 - What are you least sure of?
 - How could you discover more about this community?

Summary

This exercise gives your participants a chance to share what they know about their interface audiences and how they came to those realizations. This could be particularly important for newcomers to your agency as they begin to learn from those who have been around. At the same time, the interface audience of tomorrow is not what it was yesterday. It is important for all resource professionals to pay attention to their audiences, to seek information, and to check assumptions.

For more information about community assessments, obtain a copy of the U.S. E.P.A. document *Community Culture and the Environment: A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place* (EPA 842-B-01-003), Office of Water, Washington DC. It is available from the National Center for Environmental Publications and Information at (513) 489-8190; (800) 490-9198; P.O. Box 42419, Cincinnati OH 45242; and ncepiwo@one.net.



Worksheet 1: What Do You Know about the Community?

Check the “I know” box to indicate that you are familiar with the following information about your audience. If you aren’t completely certain, how would you find out? (Fill in some brief notes in the section “I could find out more by. . .”)

Community Questions	I know	I could find out more by . . .
How long have people lived in this community? How many newcomers came from nearby cities, and how many came from other states?		
Why do people move here? What attracts people to this area? Are these qualities constant, growing, or disappearing?		
What is the average age of the people in the community? How does this vary by length of residence? Are newcomers mostly retired? Are young families moving in?		
What is the ethnic composition of the community? How many different languages are spoken in homes?		
How important is religion in this community? What are the most common religions?		
Is this a working class community? A retirement village? A neighborhood of people who commute to a nearby city? How much expendable income is available to these people and how much time do they have to use it?		
How do people in this community define environmental quality?		
What do people value in this community? How important is environmental quality compared to other values?		
In a neighborhood, how do people value their houses? Are they merely dry places to sleep, or are they an economic investment? Are their homes a place to relax and recharge?		
Do people own interface property (more than 10 acre) because they want privacy, isolation, their own piece of nature, to make money from the resources, or to take care of the environment?		
How familiar are people in this community with the ecology of the region? Fire regime? Invasive plants? Source of drinking water? Forestry practices?		
Who owns the large pieces of land in the interface? Is it accessible for recreation? Are the resources intensively managed? Are there conservation easements?		
How is land in the wildland-urban interface zoned? What could it look like in 10 years? 20 years?		